

Comfort Packs

The concept of providing comfort packs has gained popularity over the last few years. A comfort pack consists of medications that are filled as individual prescriptions for a specific patient and typically includes starter dose quantities of medications to treat anticipated conditions such as pain, nausea and vomiting, anxiety, secretions, and dyspnea. There may be specialized packs for pain, cardiac or seizure patients. The prescriptions are typically in a sealed unit placed in the home to be used according to agency policy and/or nurse's discretion according to the physician's prescribed instructions for use. The comfort pack is clinically equivalent to standing orders for the medications. Agency policy and physician's instructions for use should be based on the criteria for standing orders described in the previous section.

With increasing use of comfort packs surveyors have seen more inappropriate use, including:

- Ordered on all patients without individualized assessment of potential need
- Multiple comfort packs placed in the home (basic, seizure, heart) resulting in some duplication of medications and availability of more than emergent supply
- Seeing medications in comfort pack that are also in home as separately filled prescriptions
- No documentation in the patient record that the nurse is assessing per the direction in the MUG book
- No documentation that nursing assessment addresses safety factors, capability of patient or caregiver to administer the medications OR that the diagnosis justifies the kit being placed in the home (e.g. seizure kit when there is not a diagnosis indicating seizure potential)
- Some packs contain more than a 48-hour supply of some medication
- An agency placed a comfort pack in a patient's home after she specifically stated she did not want morphine in her home
- The appearance that nurses are directing patients over the phone to initiate medications in the comfort pack without properly assessing the patient

Agencies should consider that hospice regulations for medication use in 19 CSR 35.010(2)(H) require policies and procedures for the safe and effective use of medications in accordance with accepted professional standards. The interdisciplinary group should review comfort pack use for appropriate indications and appropriate medications. The primary physician should also be accountable for proper prescribing.

Criteria for Appropriateness

1. Placing comfort pack based on careful nursing assessment for appropriateness.
2. Comfort Pack for use with Home Hospice Patients.
 - a. Not typically appropriate for Facility Nursing Home Patients.
 1. If utilized in Nursing Home patients, drugs must be "bubble packed" unit dose.

3. Home Safety assessment must be done in order to assess if patient's environment is appropriate to store comfort pack drugs in home.
 - a. In instances in which comfort pack is appropriate for patient, but home environment is not deemed safe, Hospice can utilize a lock-box to store the drugs in the patient's home. One key is given to the responsible caregiver and to the hospice.
 - b. Hospice must assess on an ongoing basis to ascertain if comfort pack drugs are safe in home.

Consideration of the following might be helpful in developing an agency policy:

- Use standing order criteria in developing policy
- When there are multiple medications for the same indication, policy and specific assessment criteria should determine the first medication to use and the sequence of use of additional medications
- The number of doses should be minimal based on availability of follow-up order delivery. A new order would be required for additional quantities unless the original comfort pack prescription includes authority for refill quantities
- The dose should be specific. If variable dosing is necessary, assessment criteria should be included to determine the dose.
- Controlled substance prescriptions must contain the following:
 - Date signed
 - Patient name and address
 - Name and strength of medication
 - Frequency
 - Route
 - Quantity
 - Physician address and DEA number
 - Original physician signature
- At the time of death of the patient, the comfort pack items will be disposed of according to hospice policies. The disposal will be documented in the patient's medical record.